



State of Connecticut
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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REPRESENTATIVE JILLIAN GILCHREST
18TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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Labor & Public Employees Committee
Public Hearing
March 15, 2020

HB 5440, AAC State Employees and Equitable Holidays

Senators Kushner and Sampson, Representatives Porter and Aurora and members of the Labor & Public Employees Committee I am Jillian Gilchrest and I represent the 18th district of West Hartford. I am here to testify on HB 5440, AAC State Employees and Equitable Holidays.

The inequity in Connecticut's current holiday policies was raised with me by a constituent, who you will hear from today. Since working for the Department of Children and Families since 1998 she has used more than 65 personal days to observe Jewish holidays. The current law provides full-time, permanent state employees with three days of paid personal leave per calendar year, "for the purpose of conducting private affairs, including observance of religious holidays..." While it is important that current law is explicit that employees can use personal time for religious observances, the current policy gives preferential treatment to Christian observances which are provided to state employees as paid holiday time in addition to personal time.

Connecticut has twelve state holidays, two of which are Christian holidays; Good Friday and Christmas. For the employee who recognizes these two holidays, they get paid time out of work without having to use personal leave. I am requesting that the Labor & Public Employees Committee vote to establish an equitable holiday policy whereby state employees can swap out at least two current state holidays for religious observances of their choosing.

Delaware, New Hampshire, and Texas offer their state employees flexible holiday policies. Although they vary, these states give employees a choice over which paid holidays they take. Connecticut's policy shouldn't be too prescriptive because we want to avoid requiring multi-faith families to swap out one religious holiday for another.

I propose Connecticut offer full-time state employees at least two floating holidays per fiscal year, which must be used as whole days within the fiscal year. The goal is to keep this policy cost-neutral. Employees will not receive any additional paid time off because they will take the holidays of their choosing in lieu of a current state holiday. When we last raised this bill concept in 2020, the main objection had to do with state employees who chose to work on a state holiday when state buildings are closed. Since that time, our state has had to adjust to a new reality of remote work. State employees should be encouraged to work remotely on days when offices are closed for state holidays. In instances where employees cannot telecommute, the committee should consider establishing parameters to ensure closed state office buildings are not opened as a result of this policy change.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JG', with a stylized, cursive-like script.

Jillian Gilchrest